

# INDIAN AFFAIRS MANUAL

Part 28

Human Capital Management

Chapter 451

Awards and Recognition

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- 1.1 Purpose.** This policy defines the options and requirements for recognizing individual and group achievement and acknowledging contributions that lead to achievement of organizational, team, or individual results. Awards and Recognition are motivational tools to encourage employees to take an active part in improving government operations by making full use of their skills and ideas. When appropriate, Indian Affairs (IA) will recognize and reward those employees whose individual or group efforts have contributed to the efficiency, economy, or increased effectiveness of IA. Awards are recommended by the immediate supervisor or rating official, and are approved based on the appropriate Delegations of Authority.
- 1.2 Scope.** This policy applies to all employees under the authority of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs (AS-IA), including the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and offices/organizations reporting to officials in the Office of the AS-IA. This policy does not apply to employees in the Senior Executive Service; performance appraisal procedures for the Senior Executive Service are in 5 CFR 430 Subpart C and 370 DM 430.
- 1.3 Policy.** It is the policy of Indian Affairs to:
- A.** Appropriately recognize and reward individuals and groups for superior performance, or other efforts that substantially exceed normal expectations and result in improved productivity or improved services.
  - B.** Ensure that awards are based on merit and that supervisors recommend and grant awards in an equitable and commensurate manner.
  - C.** Ensure that monetary and nonmonetary recognition is based on demonstrated, documented, high quality performance.
  - D.** Recognize employees without regard to any non-merit factors such as race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or physical/mental disability.
  - E.** Ensure that all awards and recognition comply with applicable laws, Departmental policies, and requirements.
- 1.4 Types of Awards.** Regulations provide for four forms of performance-based awards that can be given to federal employees: lump-sum cash awards (monetary awards), time off awards, honorary awards, and informal recognition awards.
- A. Monetary awards** may be given to employees who rated at Level 4 (Superior) or Level 5 (Exceptional) under DOI's 5-level performance management system. An employee who achieves a Superior (Level 4) rating is eligible for a monetary award of up to 3 percent of base pay, a Time-Off Award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition. An employee who achieves an Exceptional (Level 5) rating is eligible for one or more of the following: a monetary award of up to 5 percent of base pay, a Quality Step Increase, a Time-Off Award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition.

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A cash award may be a specific dollar amount or a percentage of the employee's pay. Based on 5 CFR 451.104(g), when awards are computed as a percentage of an employee's rate of base pay, the rate of base pay must include locality payments under 5 U.S.C. 5304, special rate supplements under 5 U.S.C. 5305 and/or other similar payments.

Monetary awards based on a specific dollar amount in excess of \$5,000 require approval of the Assistant Secretary. Performance-based cash awards, based on a percentage of the employee's pay, in excess of \$5,000 do not require the approval of the Assistant Secretary.

**B. Quality Step Increase (QSI)** is a *faster than normal* within-grade increase used to reward employees at all General Schedule grade levels who display exceptional performance. The employee's current rating of record is the basis for the QSI. QSIs are given in addition to regular within-grade increases and will not affect the timing of an employee's next regular within-grade increase, unless the QSI places the employee in step 4 or step 7 of their grade. In these cases, waiting periods are extended an additional 52 weeks (waiting periods are 52 weeks for steps 1-3, 104 weeks for steps 4-6, and 156 weeks for steps 7-9). The time an employee has already waited counts towards the next increase, but they must wait the full period that the new step requires. To be eligible for a QSI, an employee must:

- be below step 10 of their grade level;
- achieve an overall rating of Exceptional (level 5) on their current Performance Appraisal;
- have demonstrated sustained exceptional performance.

**C. Time-Off Award** is an excused absence granted to an employee without charge to leave or loss of pay, as a means of recognition. The minimum time-off recognition is one hour; and time-off awards shall not exceed 40 hours. Time-off awards cannot be transferred to another agency upon separation of the employee, and employees are not entitled to receive payment for any unused time-off award hours.

Nominees must demonstrate a high quality accomplishment(s) that contribute(s) to the quality, efficiency, or economy of government operations, for example making a contribution that exceeds normal expectations and involves a difficult or important project or assignment; displaying special initiative and skill in completing an assignment or project before the deadline; using initiative and creativity in making improvements in a program or service; or ensuring the mission of the organization is accomplished during a difficult period by successfully completing additional work or a project assignment(s) while sustaining the normal, everyday workload.

The immediate supervisor has the authority to schedule the use of the time-off award so that organizational workload is considered and productivity is sustained. Therefore, the employee and the immediate supervisor will agree on the use of the time-off award.

Time-off awards must be used within 1-year after the effective date of the award. Employees should be informed of the 1-year limitation on use at the time the award is presented. Awards not used within 1-year will expire.

**D. STAR Awards** - the Special Thanks for Achieving Results (STAR) award is a monetary award of \$50 or more, gross amount. The amount of the award should be commensurate with the value of the individual or team accomplishment, considering the overall benefit to the government, but shall be consistent with the amounts criteria in Appendix A. Examples of situations for which it would be appropriate to give an employee a STAR Award are: producing exceptionally high quality work under tight deadlines; performing additional or emergency assignments along with an employee's regular duties; or exercising extraordinary initiative or creativity in addressing a critical need or difficult problem.

Only one STAR award may be given for a specific accomplishment. Form DI-451, Award Certification, is used to recommend a STAR award, and the justification must reflect the employee's accomplishment(s) and be personalized and specific to the employee.

An employee's immediate supervisor normally initiates an award nomination, however an award can be recommended by an authorized official outside the employee's chain of command who is knowledgeable of or benefited from the employee's contribution(s). If someone other than the employee's immediate supervisor initiates the nomination, the Award Certification must be submitted to the proposed recipient's supervisor for concurrence before the award can be processed for payment. Under no circumstances will an award nomination be processed without the concurrence of the individual's immediate supervisor. STAR awards are paid by the office recommending the award.

- If the STAR award is recommended and approved within the employee's chain of command, the amount of the award counts toward the approving official's limit; and counts against the performance rating period limit during which the award was approved.
- If a STAR award is recommended and approved by an authorized official outside the employee's chain of command, it does not count toward the performance period award limits for the employee or his/her supervisor. Such an award must be signed off by the employee's first line supervisor.

**E. Honorary Awards** are a traditional form of high-level, formal recognition, generally symbolic, and usually do not involve monetary recognition at all. They are a gesture of respect given to employees to recognize their performance and value to the organization. Because honorary awards represent symbolic formal recognition, items presented as honorary awards must meet **all** of the following criteria:

- A basic principle of symbolic awards is that their primary value should be as a form of recognition and not as an object with monetary value.

- The item must have a lasting trophy value. An honorary award must not be intangible or transitory, such as food or beverages. Vouchers and tickets to events, while technically tangible themselves, do not meet this criteria because they are intended to be redeemed for something that does not have lasting value.
- The item must clearly symbolize the employer-employee relationship (such as having the agency logo on an honorary award item).
- The item must take an appropriate form to be displayed in the public sector and to be purchased with public funds. IA officials must take responsibility for assuring that the authority to “incur necessary expense for honorary recognition” is used in a manner that shows good judgment and preserves the credibility and integrity of the Federal Government’s awards program.

**F. Productivity Improvement and Invention Patent Awards** –For guidance on these awards, please refer to the Departmental policy for Awards and Recognition contained in 370 DM 451.

**G. Informal Recognition Awards** are given to reward performance that otherwise might not merit an award such as cash or time-off. Agencies use these awards to provide more frequent and timely informal recognition to employees. An employee’s **contribution** still forms the basis for using an informal recognition award and should be clearly acknowledged as part of any presentation. Items presented as informal recognition awards must meet the following criteria:

- The item must be of nominal value, but commensurate with the contribution being recognized. These awards recognize contributions that would not ordinarily merit formal recognition. No exact dollar value is set as nominal, but supervisors are expected to use good judgment and remember that nominal refers to a low monetary value.
- The item must take an appropriate form to be used in the public sector and to be purchased with public funds. Agency officials are responsible for determining that items used as informal recognition awards preserve the credibility and integrity of the Federal Government’s awards program.

## **1.5 Receiving both a Rating-based Award and an Award for Specific Contribution (i.e., STAR Award) in the Same Year.**

In some circumstances, an employee may receive both an award based on a rating of record and an award based on a specific contribution in a single year. Supervisors must consider the circumstances carefully, and determine whether the accomplishment to be recognized with a specific contribution award was part of the employee's performance plan:

**A.** If the accomplishment is not included in the performance plan (i.e., an employee's contribution to a special project not related to his/her expected performance), the

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supervisor should determine whether the accomplishment, **on its own merits**, deserves recognition without regard to the employee's rating-based award.

**B.** If the accomplishment is included in, or related to, the employee's performance plan, it is more appropriate to grant a rating-based award, which recognizes the employee's overall performance (unless the extent of the accomplishment's value to the organization is determined to warrant further recognition.) In very rare circumstances when the value of the accomplishment to the organization is so high that the rating-based award alone would not fully recognize it, both a rating-based award and a specific contribution award may be warranted.

Supervisors must ensure they comply with all applicable requirements, including OPM approval of awards over \$10,000 for a single accomplishment.

## 1.6 Authority.

**A.** 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43 and 45

**B.** 5 CFR Parts 430 and 451

**C.** Comptroller General Decisions B-223319 July 21, 1986; and B-235163.11, February 13, 1996.

**D.** 370 DM 451.1 Awards and recognition - General

**E.** 370 DM 451.2 Performance Awards

**F.** 370 DM 451.4 Monetary Awards

**G.** 370 DM 451.5 Non-Monetary Awards

**H.** 370 DM 451.6 Outside Awards

## 1.7 Responsibilities.

**A. The Deputy Assistant Secretary – Management** is responsible for the overall management and administration of Human Capital Management (HCM) policy for Indian Affairs.

**B. The Office of Human Capital Management (OHCM)** is responsible for advising and assisting in identifying program needs and formulating policies to effect a viable Indian Affairs program. This office also has responsibility for the technical compliance review coordination of award recommendations that must be endorsed or approved by the AS-IA.

**C. Director, BIA and Director, BIE** are responsible for ensuring that efficient and appropriate Awards and Recognition programs are conducted by their respective bureaus and that awards comply with all applicable requirements.

**D. Supervisors** are responsible for recommending awards and recognition based on merit, and for providing specific examples of demonstrated, documented, high quality performance. Supervisors ensure that awards are made in an equitable and commensurate manner.

**E. Servicing Human Resources Offices** are responsible for assisting managers and supervisors in recognizing and rewarding exceptional employee performance. Servicing personnel offices must also review, each fiscal year, all monetary awards processed by their Region. The review should analyze award patterns, program equality, and compliance with policy, and are sent to the Director, OHCM.

## **1.8 Limitations and Prohibitions.**

The granting of an award, failure to grant an award, the amount of a monetary award, the receipt of or failure to receive a QSI, or the receipt of or failure to receive any other type of discretionary award are a management prerogative and are not subject to administrative grievance procedures.

There are prohibitions on awards for certain federal employees, such as political employees (Schedule C and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) members) who are not eligible to receive awards between June 1 of any year in which there is a Presidential election and January 20 of the following year (see 5 CFR § 451.105).

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## Appendix A: DOI SCALE OF AWARDS BASED ON INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

<b>Value of Benefit</b>	<b>EXTENT OF APPLICATION</b>		
	<b>Local</b>	<b>Bureau</b>	<b>Department-wide</b>
	Accomplishment affects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one or more field facilities or Central Office organizational elements or staff office, or</li> <li>a change or correction of a BIA/BIE policy, or procedure, or</li> <li>a change in the area of technology or automation</li> </ul>	Accomplishment affects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an entire network, region, or</li> <li>all Central Office organizations, or</li> <li>ideas approved for optional use in the Department or an administration, or</li> <li>important area of technology or automation</li> </ul>	Accomplishment affects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more than one region, or bureau</li> <li>has impact DOI wide or beyond.</li> </ul>
<b>Moderate.</b> Important change or contribution to an operating principle, practice, procedure or program of limited impact or use.	<b>Up to \$500</b>	<b>Up to \$1,500</b>	<b>Up to \$3,000</b>
<b>Substantial.</b> Significant change, contribution to, or modification of an operating principle, practice, procedure, program, or service to the public.	<b>Up to \$1,500</b>	<b>Up to \$3,000</b>	<b>Up to \$5,000</b>
<b>Exceptional.</b> Major improvement in the quality of a critical product, activity, program or service to the public. Complete revision or initiation of a major policy or practice that has significant impact on DOI's mission.	<b>Up to \$3,000</b>	<b>Up to \$5,000</b>	Up to \$10,000  Awards more than \$10,000 require OPM approval. Awards more than \$25,000 require Presidential approval after OPM review.

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## Appendix B: GUIDANCE ON PERFORMANCE BASED AWARDS

Rating	Award Eligibility
	<i>Managers have the flexibility to recognize employees using any of the award recognitions outlined below or a combination thereof:</i>
<b>Exceptional (Level 5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Performance-based cash award up to 5% of salary;</li><li>➤ Quality Step Increase (QSI), if eligible;</li><li>➤ Time-Off Award, not to exceed 40 hours;</li><li>➤ Other appropriate equivalent recognition.</li></ul>
<b>Superior (Level 4)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Performance-based cash award up to 3% of salary;</li><li>➤ Time-Off Award, not to exceed 40 hours;</li><li>➤ Other appropriate equivalent recognition.</li></ul>
<b>Fully Successful (Level 3)</b>	<b>Not eligible to receive performance-based award.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Appropriate recognition for noteworthy contribution(s) within the rating period that are not linked to sustained performance.</li></ul>
<b>Minimally Successful (Level 2)</b>	<b>Not eligible to receive an award.</b>
<b>Unsatisfactory (Level 1)</b>	<b>Not eligible to receive an award.</b>